

30 Common Plants of the Chihuahuan Desert

There are thirty plants (native and non-native) common to large areas within the Chihuahuan Desert. Because the Chihuahuan Desert is so large (southeastern New Mexico, southwest Texas and most of northcentral Mexico) the same plant may have two to seven names; hence, the need for a universal name. The following are common and scientific names for frequently occurring forbs, grasses, shrubs and trees within the Chihuahuan Desert.

Forbs

silverleaf nightshade	<u>Solanum elaeagnifolium</u>
desert globmallow	<u>Sphaeralcea coccinea</u>
common dandelion	<u>Taraxacum officinale</u>
Russianthistle	<u>Salsola kali</u> (introduced)

Grasses

black grama	<u>Bouteloua eriopoda</u>
blue grama	<u>Bouteloua gracilis</u>
sideoats grama	<u>Bouteloua curtipendula</u>
Lehmann lovegrass	<u>Eragrostis lehmanniana</u> (introduced)
Tobosa	<u>Hilaria mutica</u>
Johnsongrass	<u>Sorghum halepense</u> (introduced)
alkali sacaton	<u>Sporobolus airoides</u>
big sacaton	<u>Sporobolus wrightii</u>
green springletop	<u>Leptochloa dubia</u>
bermudagrass	<u>Cynodon dactylon</u> (introduced)
sandbur	<u>Cenchrus pauciflorus</u>
bristlegrass	<u>Setaria macrostachya</u>

Shrubs and Trees

western soapberry	<u>Sapindus saponaria</u>
algerita	<u>Berberis trifoliolata</u>
Mormon-tea	<u>Ephedra trifurca</u>
tarbush	<u>Flourensia cernua</u>
ocotillo	<u>Fouquieria splendens</u>
one-seed juniper	<u>Juniperus monosperma</u>
creosotebush	<u>Larrea tridentata</u>
pricklypear & cholla cactus	<u>Opuntia spp.</u>
mesquite	<u>Prosopis juliflora</u>
skunkbush	<u>Rhus trilobata</u>
saltcedar	<u>Tamarix parviflora</u> (introduced)
yucca	<u>Yucca torreyi</u>
desert willow	<u>Chilopsis linearis</u>
sotol	<u>Dasylirion texanum</u>

The teacher will be responsible for providing examples (either photographs, illustrations or fresh samples) of some or all of the above plants. The teacher will also illustrate how to use the plant press.

It is important for students to understand that not all plants are native to the Chihuahuan Desert.

Russianthistle came to the United States in the late 1880s from a Russian wheat shipment to western Washington and Idaho.

Lehmann lovegrass came from the Kalahari Desert in southern Africa and was shipped to Arizona during a drought in the 1920s.

Johnsongrass came from India and was introduced into Texas in about 1925.

Bermudagrass is a hybrid from genetic material collected on the east coast of Texas and the southeast coast of southern Africa.

Saltcedar came from India and Pakistan, and was used to make windbreaks in the southwest United States during the Dust Bowl.